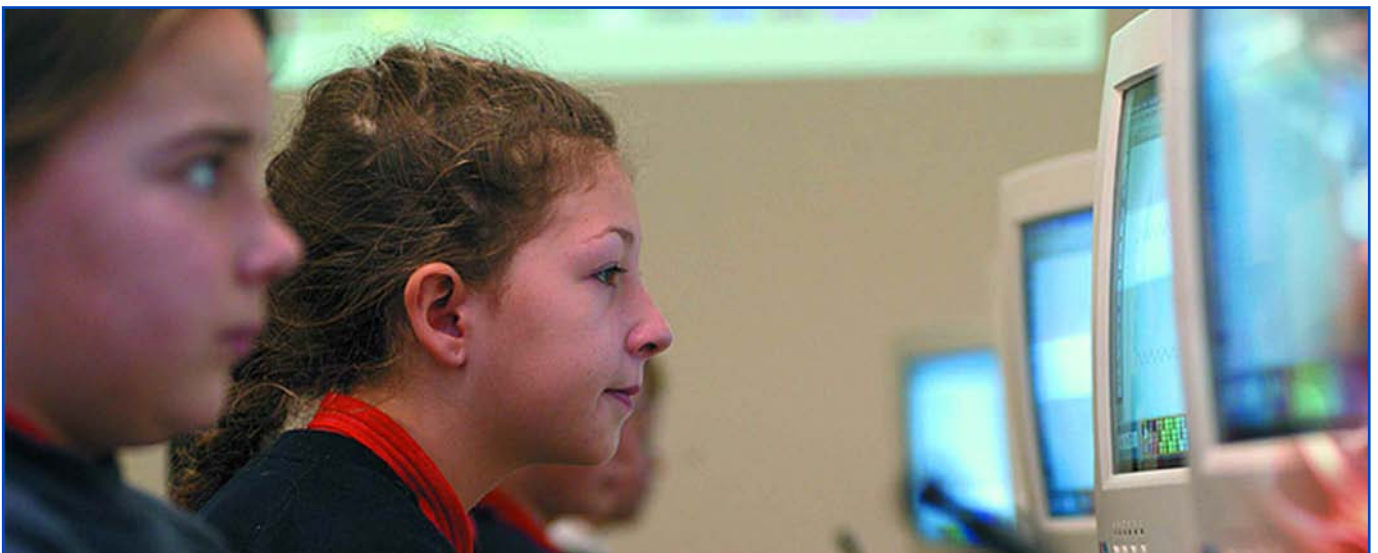


Background to the **SSA**

The Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) is the annual national survey of pupils' attainment in the Scottish 5-14 curriculum at P3, P5, P7 and S2. It plays an important part in the overall pattern of assessment in Scottish schools.

SSA surveys take place in late April/May each year when pupils are close to completing their programmes of work for the year.



Currently surveys cover English language (2005), social subjects (enquiry skills) (2006), science (2007) and mathematics (2008). The core skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem solving and working with others will also be assessed each year in these subject contexts.

Assessments used in surveys are made more generally available through the National Assessment Bank (www.aifl-na.net).

At present this applies to reading, writing and mathematics assessments only, but is likely to be extended to other areas in the future.

The main findings of surveys are published by SEED in December of the year in which the survey took place. Reports on specific aspects of pupils' performance may subsequently be produced where there are findings which may be of particular interest to teachers and schools.



Benefits of the SSA

The SSA provides a sound basis for reporting how well pupils' learning is being developed in the 5-14 curriculum in Scotland as a whole and in individual local authorities. Each year, SSA findings will provide information about levels of attainment and provision in Scotland as a whole and in half the individual Scottish local authorities.

SSA is a sample survey. It is not necessary to test every pupil in every school to obtain reliable data to report on pupils' attainment. So, each year a random sample of pupils in a representative sample of schools takes part in the survey. This reduces the amount of time which teachers and pupils need to spend on formal testing for national monitoring, allowing more time for learning and teaching. Sampling also enables better coverage of the curriculum, as different pupils can tackle different tasks. SSA is organised using pupil identifier numbers. Only the schools taking part know the names of the pupils in the sample.

Schools can use the findings of the survey to evaluate their own performance and provision. They can compare the performance of their pupils, based on the evidence of the pupils' attainment they have collected from classwork, with the results for Scotland and their own local authority.

In each survey some of the assessments from previous surveys are repeated to allow direct comparisons to be made over time.

SSA monitors attainment in P3, P5, P7 and S2. This provides a good structure for following the progress of a group of pupils through their schooling. For example, the group of pupils assessed in P3 will be in P7 in the next survey in the same area of the curriculum four years later and therefore may be involved again.

Local authorities are asked to nominate teachers as field officers, markers and moderators for the SSA. The teachers are trained to carry out these tasks and encouraged to share their experiences with colleagues following the survey. Teachers who take part make a valuable contribution to the survey and value the experience as part of their continuing professional development.

The part played by schools and pupils

Schools randomly selected to take part in an SSA survey are asked to:

- > With the help of the authority, identify the pupils who have been anonymously and randomly selected to take part in the survey. The names are used only to make it easier for the school to administer the survey.
- > Seek agreement of parents/carers for the pupils to take part.
- > Make arrangements for pupils to complete assessment tasks – written tasks are supervised by teachers, practical tasks are supervised by field officers.
- > Return the completed assessments. Schools are not required to mark the assessments.
- > Provide information about attainment data for mathematics, reading and writing for each pupil taking part in the survey.
- > Provide examples of classwork, marked and moderated by the school, (e.g. writing) if asked.
- > Complete questionnaires about classroom resources and methods.
- > Some schools may be asked to make arrangements for field officers to carry out practical assessments with some of the sampled pupils.



Using the information from the survey

SSA provides sound data for comparing the performance of girls and boys.

SSA can provide useful information about the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' performance in a subject and therefore help to shape future teaching and learning. It can, for example, provide detailed information on pupils' performance of different aspects of mathematics or science.

SSA uses questionnaires for teachers and pupils to provide a snapshot of learning and teaching in Scottish schools. It provides information about the class organisation, resources and methodologies being used, as well as about the wider social environment in which pupils' learning takes place.



Involvement of pupils

The pupils who are randomly selected to take part in the survey are asked to complete three assessment booklets.

The assessment booklets contain tasks covering two or three of the 5-14 levels.

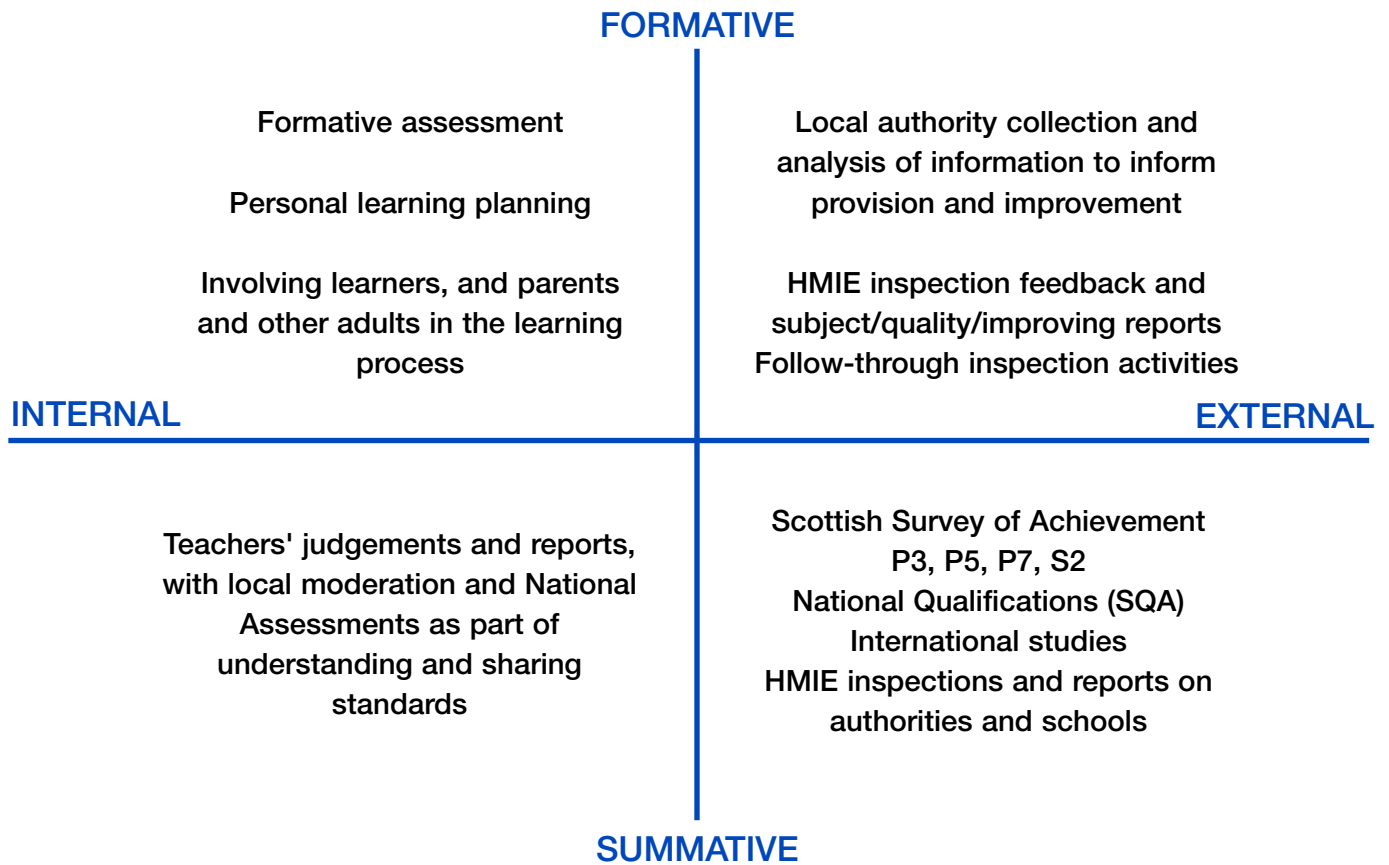
The pupils are asked to complete a questionnaire about their classroom experiences, e.g. time spent listening to the teacher, working in groups, using ICT.

In addition some pupils may be asked to take part in practical assessments, e.g. using ICT, talk.





The national assessment system



Further information about the developments proposed for assessment, testing and reporting policy for 3-14 year olds, outlined in [Ambitious, Excellent Schools](#) and in the response to the consultation on assessment, [Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: Our Response](#) can be found in [Circular No. 02 June 2005: Assessment and reporting 3-14](#). These developments capture what is best in current practice in Scottish schools and build upon the work undertaken through the [AifL - Assessment is for Learning programme](#) since 2002.